

Recommended Labeling Guidelines for “Compostable” Products and Packaging

The goal of these guidelines is to aid in the identification of products including foodservice items, such as plates, cups, cutlery, and food packaging, which are compostable in large scale, industrial facilities. These guidelines will help consumers properly dispose of compostable items after use. In addition, these guidelines will help municipal officials, waste haulers, and composters to distinguish between compostable and non-compostable products.

While this document provides and establishes recommended directions, it is important to remember that ultimately brand owners will make the final decision in how the products are labeled.

The key principles of the guidelines are as follows:

1. Products intended to be composted in large-scale facilities shall meet ASTM D6400 or ASTM D6868 or the comparable standards EN 13432, ISO 17088, and BNQ 9011-911/2007.
 - Foodservice items are made from a wide array of materials, ranging from plastics, plastic coated paper, to bagasse, paper, and molded pulp. Use of these specifications is clearly appropriate for items that use plastics, either to make up the entire product (as is the case with cutlery) or as coatings. These specifications insure that the entire product will swiftly disintegrate and then fully biodegrade. This reduces composters processing and disposal costs, and improves their end products.
 - Use of these specifications is also appropriate for bagasse, paper and molded pulp items. These items may contain polymers to improve moisture and grease resistance, which can affect the ability of the products to disintegrate swiftly and again increase residues at the end of the composting process. Further, by meeting the specifications, manufacturers can demonstrate that these products will not introduce impact the ability of the finished compost to support plants.
2. All labeling of products, sales materials and websites shall comply with the regulations of the country where the products are sold and shall clearly state that these products are suitable for composting only in a large-scale facility.
 - In the US, the Federal Trade Commission’s “Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims” should be followed.
 - In Canada, the directions of the Competition Bureau should be followed;
 - Manufacturers are strongly encouraged to check with the appropriate legal resources to assure that they comply with and the US, Canadian and other national or regional requirements.

3. The word “compostable” and appropriate qualifications should be as readily visible as possible on both the product and packaging, given technical, graphic, and economic considerations. This direction embraces labeling of all types, including printing, embossing, and adhesive stickers. It is understood that this may not be possible in all cases, especially on small or narrow items.
4. Graphic elements may be used to increase legibility of the word “compostable”. These may include text boxes, stripes, or bands. Green is the preferred printing color followed by brown. However, color and design will be driven by individual brand owners.
5. Based on testing in independent laboratories, showing that their products meet the above specifications, manufactures may label them as “Compostable” in large-scale facilities, as long as they satisfy the other FTC requirements. Manufacturers may additionally seek certification by qualified third parties, such as the BPI, DIN Certco, AIB Vincotte or the Bureau de normalization du Quebec (BNQ) to further increase credibility of their claims.
6. In some cases, it is possible to either compost or recycle products. In this situation, the manufacturer may label them as both recyclable and compostable. Additionally, the manufacturer or distributor should work with foodservice operators and waste haulers to insure that these products are handled appropriately.

Additional information can be found at the following links:

Federal Trade Commission: www.ftc.gov/bcp/grnrule/guides980427.htm

BPI: www.bpiworld.org

Din Certco: www.dincertco.de/en/index.html

AIB Vincotte: www.aib-vincotte.com

BNQ: www.bnq.qc.ca/en/certif/marque_confor_compostable.html